

**Confirmation Hearing
Grether Opening Statement
9.7.16**

Opening

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today.

And, Senator Casperson, thank you for your leadership and support for amendments to Parts 201 and 213. Your assistance is much appreciated.

I am honored to have been asked by Governor Snyder to lead the Department of Environmental Quality at this challenging time.

I understand that my appointment has raised concerns in some quarters, and I hope to allay some of those concerns today.

Background

It is important to point out that I am a product of much more than just one or two of my past jobs.

I am a product of all my experiences including my upbringing, my education, my time working for business and as a former Senate staffer, and a township trustee – as well as my personal interests and values.

Except for a brief stint working on the Gulf Coast, I am a lifelong resident of Michigan. I grew up loving Michigan's great outdoors and have always been a champion of our state.

As a child, I was always outside – walking in the woods, digging in the dirt, collecting rocks along the Great Lakes shorelines were favorite memories and pastimes.

At a young age, I understood the magic of our state. My father was on the Board of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and was very active in conservation efforts, including the hiring of the legendary Tom Washington.

Because of my love for the outdoors and an understanding that protecting our natural resources had to include considerations of economic factors, I pursued a Master's degree in Natural Resource Economics and Policy at Michigan State University.

I wanted to be a constructive part of future policy discussions by marrying the unique characteristics of natural resource management with the economic realities of our market based system.

Fortunately for me, that background has held me in good stead over the years.

BP

Much has been made of my employment with BP, both as a lobbyist and in response to the Gulf spill.

Certainly, those experiences contribute to what I bring to this position.

In representing BP in the legislative and executive arenas, I had multi-state responsibilities in the Midwest covering a broad range of issues including tax, franchise, transportation, and beer and wine. Environmental issues were a small part of my portfolio.

My primary role was really to serve as a translator between the company and state legislatures, regulatory agencies and executive offices.

These groups, more often than not, do not speak the same language, which can lead to unnecessary conflicts.

I spent most of my time trying to get company staff and state staff to understand each other's perspectives and find common ground for solutions.

I opted to retire from BP in October 2008, rather than transfer to Columbus, Ohio.

My work in response to the Deep Water Horizon spill was similarly focused.

In May, 2010, I was contacted about helping BP in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon spill.

Initially, my job was to help communities, individuals and businesses understand the resources that were available to them.

What I thought would be a contract position lasting through the summer turned into a four-year stint, two in Mississippi and two in Houston.

As time went on, I was promoted to help those same groups and elected officials understand the ongoing remediation work, and assist in dealing with their concerns and needs.

Again, my role involved providing information on issues related to response and remediation, not environmental issues themselves.

My experience with crisis situations has prepared me to step into this role at this time.

Only after the approved wind-down of the active response and all that entailed, was I able to come home to Michigan.

Moving Forward

I'd like to touch on two things regarding moving forward.

First, while managing DEQ's many environmental programs and carrying out our statutory and regulatory responsibilities underlies everything we do, we cannot be effective until we address the elephant in the room.

Flint has changed things for the DEQ.

There are concerns that every decision will be scrutinized using a lens different from past practices. I accept this.

The Department of Environmental Quality is full of intelligent, knowledgeable, dedicated professionals who share my love of the state of Michigan and value our abundant natural resources.

But, DEQ staff members cannot be disheartened or afraid to make decisions.

We must restore the morale of DEQ employees through strong leadership and support of their work.

Staff needs to be empowered to think creatively, challenge convention and do their jobs without fear.

And trust if they do their jobs, leadership will have their backs.

Related to restoring staff morale is restoring faith and trust in the Department - it's interactions with external audiences, guidance and decisions.

We need to ensure we are doing the right things at the right times by engaging in a top to bottom evaluation of not only what the Department does, but also how it does it.

Let me be perfectly clear, this is NOT a job of public relations. It is about protecting the environment and public health.

Rebuilding external trust will come from all our deeds; by being stewards of our environment. Words alone will not do.

Second, the DEQ leadership team has changed substantially, which provides us an opportunity for a department reset.

From August 1 through end of year:

Executive office – Four of 6 new

Director

Deputy Director

Director of Communications

Deputy Director for Economic and Strategic Initiatives

Division Chiefs – Four of 6

Waste Management & Radiological Protection

Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance

Remediation and Redevelopment

Water Resources Division

Additionally, we can use lessons learned and process improvements in one area to replicate successes in throughout the department.

My Approach

My approach to people and issues is to be fair, keep an open mind, endeavor to understand all perspectives, weigh options, and follow both the spirit and letter of the law.

I expect the same of all DEQ staff.

As an agency, we must provide exceptional customer service to the citizens of the State of Michigan, and listen to all voices in the room, including the concerned public, business representatives, environmental groups, elected officials and private citizens.

Informed decisions are the best decisions, and in the case of DEQ it must also include sound science to support those decisions.

Additionally, I understand that our authority comes through the Legislature and that you have allowed us to have that authority.

Pledge

My overall pledge is that DEQ support a regulatory environment that is fair and responsive to concerns raised by interested parties.

That we will listen to various points of view and "stand in their shoes."

Finally, we will work with individuals and organizations that want to work with us and find solutions to the problems and issues the state faces.

Will there still be disagreements? Certainly, as a regulatory agency, we will not please everyone all the time.

My pledge to you is that I will work with you to find solutions on issues of concern and legislative alternatives.

Closing

As DEQ moves forward, there will certainly be changes and growing pains, but that is part of a healthy, dynamic organization.

Give us some time to find our new equilibrium at DEQ, help us with constructive suggestions, tell us what we can improve on, and, tell us what we do well.

I am very excited to put my management team in place, to move forward from the past challenges and build a DEQ that the public trusts and respects and that employees are proud of.

I look forward to this opportunity and hope you will join me on this road to protecting not only Michigan's resources, but also its citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.